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FYI.
From State's Newsletter, Jan '85.
Retirement pg 3.

OLL

Date 14 Jan 85

In the Department

20-1

A report on the second management conference at Wye

Focus was on administration, regulations

BY KAREN KING

The author, a participant at the conference, is deputy director of the Office of Management Operations.

WHICH GREAT ISSUES of our time would compel two under-secretaries, five assistant secretaries and a dozen or so deputy assistant secretaries and office directors to spend an Indian summer weekend in October talking with each other in a windowless room?



Ms. King

If your answer is "packing and storage of household effects," "speeding up pouch service" or "personnel structure," you are absolutely right. These were among the topics discussed when the under secretary for management, Ronald I. Spiers; the under secretary for political affairs, Michael Armacost; and the Department's senior managers met October 12 for the second "Wye Conference" on management.

At the first conference (in the Aspen Institute's Wye Plantation Conference Center on Maryland's eastern shore) last January, personnel issues were the main topic. This second meeting focused more on administrative services and regulations.

In addition to Mr. Spiers and Mr. Armacost, conference participants included members of the Management Council (the director general and director of personnel, Roy Atherton; the director of management operations, Bill De Pree; deputy comptroller Lorin Jurvis; inspector general Bill Harrop; the assistant secretary for administration, Bob Lamb; Foreign Service Institute director

Steve Low; the executive assistant to the under secretary for management, Sheldon Krysi; and others.

4 'problem areas'

Mr. Spiers opened the first session Friday afternoon with an outline of the four main problem areas on which he believes management should concentrate its efforts: the Department's resource base, the structure of the personnel system, international communications and administrative services to the employees, and the Department's organizational structure.

Elaborating on these themes, he observed that the Department has been seriously underfunded. It has not, he said, done a thorough job in identifying resource needs nor in arguing its case as forcefully as it should have with the Office of Management and Budget and Congress. He saw the problem with the personnel structure as largely one of imbalance. The Senior Foreign Service, he said, has a persistent surplus of officers; at the junior level the distribution of needed positions has the result that many officers will not have an assignment in cone before reaching tenure, while many others have no chance of an out-of-cone broadening assignment. He added that restoring balance to the Foreign Service structure remains a major management goal. (Civil Service structure came up in the ensuing discussion. On this issue the conferees felt a different approach was needed. They recommended that the Department's Civil Service employees be tapped for their ideas on how to strengthen the role the Civil Service plays in achieving the Department's mission.)

Internal communication was seen as having improved with the initiation of the management cable series (also

distributed in the Department) and other measures to keep employees up to date on developments in the management area. Management, Mr. Spiers emphasized, also must continually be mindful of its responsibilities as a service organization. A major purpose of Wye II, he said, was to consider recommendations from chiefs of mission for improving the services management provides to employees. As for the fourth area, the need for "more rational" organization of the Department, that may prove the hardest to tackle, the under secretary acknowledged.

Wye I followup

The remainder of the first evening was taken up by reports on the status of recommendations made by the first Wye conference. Director general Atherton summarized some of the personnel recommendations that already have been implemented, such as the short-tour program, steps to improve recruitment and to strengthen the junior officer counseling capability, streamlining the employee evaluation form and steps to ensure that hard-to-fill jobs receive higher priority early in the assignment cycle.

Continuing the Wye I followup, Mr. Low reported the decision to seek funding for a new Foreign Service Institute campus at Arlington Hall, not far from the current location in Rosslyn, Va. Other major initiatives that the institute has underway, he said, include a program to increase language proficiency beyond the minimum professional or "3" level and an overhaul of professional training for administrative personnel. He added that the institute hopes within a year and a half to open "Admin Rosslyn," an administrative training program modeled after the consular training program, "ConGen Rosslyn."

The final Wye I followup report was made by Family Liaison Office director Marcia Curran. She said expanding opportunities for spouse employment remains a major concern. One employment issue raised at this point was the proposal to convert spouses on contract to part-time (PIT) positions so that they earn status in applying for Civil Service positions back in Washington. The conference tasked the family office and the Office of Management Operations to present to the Management Council their recommendations on conversion. (The council has received this recommendation and is awaiting the Office of Management and Budget's passback on the Department's fiscal year 1986 budget presentation in order to determine whether the 1986 employment ceiling will permit full conversion of spouse contract hires.)

Specialists, generalists

The evening closed with a discussion of executive development proposals and the need for both specialists and generalists in all Foreign Service functions. No decisions were reached on these issues, but this and other discussions about personnel structure convinced the conferees of the need for a more sophisticated workforce planning model to help management assess the impact of proposed structural changes. The Office of Management Operations and the Bureau of Personnel were tasked to draw up terms of reference for developing an improved, computer-based model.

Saturday morning opened with a discussion of how private industry attacks management problems. The speaker was Professor Michael Maccoby of Harvard University, an authority on management and organizational change. Mr. Maccoby has worked with the Bureau of Adminis-

tration to develop techniques for forging better cooperation and teamwork among bureau offices and staffs.

After his presentation, the Saturday sessions were devoted to discussions of the chiefs-of-mission letters and to suggesting ways to improve administrative services and support for Foreign Service employees. More than 80 chiefs of mission had responded to Under Secretary Spiers' letter asking them for two or three items that bother them most about the way State treats its people administratively.

The pouch

One area frequently mentioned in the responses was pouch service. Robert Ribera, deputy assistant secretary for communications, reported to the conferees his efforts to improve efficiency of the pouch service and to ease some of the workload burden by ~~using private courier services.~~ And, ~~to make sure that the Office of Communications'~~ management knows where the problems are, Mr. Ribera said he had instituted a "complaints report."

Bob Meyers, director of the Office of Transportation, followed Mr. Ribera and talked about travel and transportation problems, including packing and storage of effects. Under Secretary Spiers said he didn't know of many things more important to people overseas than when and in what condition their household effects arrive. Among the many other transportation recommendations from the chiefs of mission were some to simplify travel vouchers and expand the use of business travel. The conferees strongly supported doing whatever would be possible on both scores.

Jerry Tolson, chief of the Allowances Staff, outlined improvements in allowances and described efforts to help employees better understand ex-

isting regulations. He cited the recently-distributed "A Handy Guide to Allowances and Benefits in the Standardized Regulations," which includes citations on where applicable regulations can be found.

Chiefs of mission in their letters also suggested improvements in personnel policies and payroll administration. Lorin Jurvis, director of the Office of Budget, reported that most payroll problems will be corrected by the new American payrolling system to be implemented this year. Hank Cohen, deputy assistant secretary for personnel, said that the most frequently cited personnel problems were those involving home leave and R&R (rest and recreation) travel. Status reports on these issues were provided to the field in State 341900 (R&R) and 346768 (home leave).

Retirement issue

The expected campaign to change Government retirement systems was another agenda topic. 1985 will bring a major review of all federal retirement systems, it was reported. Bill Bacchus, director of Personnel's Policy Coordination Staff, said the Department will follow closely proposals affecting both the Foreign Service and the Civil Service. In general the strategy will be to maintain a parallel relationship between the two systems except in areas where a separate approach is fundamental to structure. Early retirement without penalty is one such area for the Foreign Service.

On another legislative front, agreement was reached to explore reactions outside the Department to raising the current limit on the amount a Foreign Service employee can earn on the combination of salary and post differentials. This amount is currently capped at \$100 less than the

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the panel. After consideration of all these factors, the panel selects one of the candidates and the assignment is made. In the vast majority of assignments, however, there's early agreement on a single candidate, and little or no discussion is necessary.

Stiff competition

It's important to remember that the open assignments system represents a free and competitive marketplace in which you are job-hunting in competition with many others. Assess *realistically* your own background, qualifications and career goals. Are you really competitive for the positions on which you're bidding? If you're not, you've wasted a bid because you'll not be considered a viable candidate. If your last economic job was 10 years ago, it's highly unlikely you'll be competitive for an economic section chief job.

Your career officer is there to help you through the assignments process. If the officer tells you your bids are "unrealistic" or "not working out," what does this mean? Because the officer knows who all the bidders are on a particular job, as well as their qualifications, he or she can assess your competitiveness with respect to the other candidates for the same position. Your career officer also knows through contacts with assignments officers and bureau office and executive directors who the preferred candidate may be, and what the prospects are for that person's obtaining the assignment. If you're bidding on a stretch assignment, and there are qualified bidders at grade, your bid may be unrealistic in terms of your opportunity to obtain the position. If you're bidding on a job at grade but have no area experience, your bid may not work out because another officer at grade *does* have the area experience. In these instances, your career officer may ask you to submit additional bids, and suggest jobs for which he or she thinks you'd be qualified and which would also be in your career interest. Don't wait un-

til late in the cycle to submit your *real* bid list. Seventy-five percent or more of the assignments are made in the first months of the cycle—December to March—and you may lose out on a job for which you would have been competitive because it's already been filled.

Either ... or

Give consideration to service at a differential post, particularly if you've never had such an assignment. You're in the best position to decide when such an assignment will meet your family's health, educational or functional requirements and your own career goals. Service need increasingly requires that more employees will have to bid such assignments or accept the possibility of being identified for these positions.

Open assignments means meshing Service needs and employees' career objectives. And when these aren't compatible, Service need will ultimately determine your assignment. Open assignments also means open competition in the marketplace. You are well and truly job hunting, just as if you were unemployed, and the more you can do to sell yourself in terms of what's realistically possible, the better off you'll be. Don't be misled by the puffery in your employee evaluation report into bidding only on deputy-chief-of-mission or stretch assignments. As in any job search, your competitiveness and marketability are influenced by your record, your contacts, your experience and your reputation. Luck and timing also play a part. None of these factors are unique to the Foreign Service. So good luck and happy hunting! ■

Wye

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salary of a chief of mission at a Class I post. Mr. Bacchus said a possible approach may include deferred payment of amounts over the cap, or additional retirement credit in lieu of

part of post differential. The conferees decided to seek an amendment to the Foreign Service Act to permit advances of pay for employees transferred to the United States. At present, advances are limited to transfers overseas.

The last items discussed on Saturday, Department organization and personnel structure, generated a request for more work by management staffs. Mr. Spiers said he welcomed ideas on needed organizational reforms and wanted to continue the dialogue on the subject of reorganization.

Continuity problem

In discussing personnel structure, several problem areas were identified: the lack of a computer-based workforce planning model (discussed previously); specialists and generalists (how many are needed at what levels, and in what functions?); the lack of staffing flexibility to meet surge workloads and to respond to crises; the need for more continuity in some domestic offices. Under Secretary Armacost suggested a study of the continuity problem and whether expanded use of Civil Service employees in some offices might be helpful. This and the other structural considerations will be followed up by Personnel and Management Operations.

As at the January conference, representatives of the family office, the Overseas Briefing Center and the American Association of Foreign Service Women met with spouses of some of the Wye II participants. For the most part, this group met separately to focus on the special concerns of Foreign Service families. In the final session of the conference, which took place Sunday morning, the spouses group introduced a proposal to establish a Foreign Service Associates Program in which spouses could opt to participate, under signed agreements, with the mission, in a wide range of activities for a fixed rate of pay. These activities might include